What is claimed is:

1   1.   A communication method comprising the steps of:

2   displaying instant messaging (IM) messages; and

3   selectively displaying a time indication, the time indication being indicative of a

4   most-recently-displayed IM message.

1   2.   The method of claim 1, wherein the step of displaying the IM messages

2   comprises the steps of:

3   providing an IM dialogue box within an IM chat window; and

4   displaying the IM messages within the IM dialogue box.

1   3.   The method of claim 2, wherein the step of selectively displaying the time

2   indication comprises the step of:

3   selectively displaying the time indication in the IM dialogue box, the time

4   indication being displayed adjacent to the most-recently-displayed IM message, the time

5   indication being displayed in response to a triggering event.

1   4.   The method of claim 1, wherein the step of selectively displaying the time

2   indication comprises the steps of:

3   providing a status area within an IM chat window; and

4   selectively displaying the time indication in the status area.

1   5.   A communication method comprising the steps of:

2   displaying a first instant messaging (IM) message;

3   calculating an elapsed time from the displaying of the first IM message;

4   determining whether a second IM message has been displayed within the elapsed

5   time;

6   displaying a first time indication, the first time indication being associated with

7   the first IM message, the first time indication being displayed in response to determining

8   that the second IM message has not been displayed within the elapsed time.

1   6.   The method of claim 5, wherein the step of displaying the first IM message

2   comprises the step of:

3   providing an IM dialogue box within an IM chat window; and

4   displaying the first IM message within the IM dialogue box.

1   7.   The method of claim 6, wherein the step of displaying the first time

2   indication comprises the step of:

3   displaying the first time indication in the IM dialogue box.

1   8.   The method of claim 5, wherein the step of displaying the first time

2   indication comprises the step of:

3   displaying a first visual delineator after the first IM message, the first visual

4   delineator having a time associated with the first IM message.

1   9.   The method of claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

2   displaying a second IM message after the elapsed time;

3   displaying a second time indication, the second time indication being associated

4   with the second IM message, the second time indication being indicative of the elapsed

5   time between the first IM message and the second IM message.

1   10.   The method of claim 9, wherein the step of displaying the second time

2   indication comprises the step of:

3   displaying a second visual delineator before the second IM message, the second

4   visual delineator having a time associated with the second IM message.

1   11.   The method of claim 10, wherein the step of displaying the second visual

2   delineator comprises the steps of:

3   providing an IM dialogue box within an IM chat window; and

4   displaying the second visual delineator in the IM dialogue box.

1   12.   The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

2   providing a status area within the IM chat window, the status area being distinct

3   from the IM dialogue box; and

4   selectively displaying a most-recently-displayed IM time in the IM dialogue box,

5   the most-recently-displayed IM time being associated with the most-recently-displayed

6   IM message.

1   13.   A communication method comprising the steps of:

2   detecting a triggering event associated with an instant messaging (IM) chat

3   session; and

4   displaying a visual indicator in response to the triggering event.

1   14.   The method of claim 13, wherein the step of detecting the triggering event

2   comprises a step selected from the group consisting of:

3   detecting an initiation of a chat session;

4   detecting a predefined period of inactivity; and

5   detecting continued activity after a predefined period of inactivity.

1   15.   The method of claim 14, wherein the step of displaying the visual indicator

2   comprises the step of:

3   displaying an initial IM time indication, the initial IM time indication being

4   indicative of a start time of the IM chat session.

1   16.   The method of claim 14, wherein the step of displaying the visual indicator

2   comprises the step of:

3   displaying an inactivity IM time indication, the inactivity IM time indication being

4   indicative of an onset of inactivity during the IM chat session.

1   17.   The method of claim 14, wherein the step of displaying the time indication

2   comprises the step of:

3   displaying a continued-activity IM time indication, the continued-activity IM time

4   indication being indicative of a time at which the IM chat session continues after an onset

5   of inactivity.

1   18.   A computer-readable medium comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display

3   instant messaging (IM) messages; and

4   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to selectively

5   display a time indication, the time indication being indicative of a most-recently-

6   displayed IM message.

1   19.   The computer-readable medium of claim 18, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to provide a

3   status area within an IM chat window; and

4   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to selectively

5   display the time indication in the status area.

1   20.   A computer-readable medium comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

3 first instant messaging (IM) message;

4   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to calculate an

5 elapsed time from the computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device

6 to display of the first IM message;

7   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to determine

8 whether a second IM message has been displayed within the elapsed time;

9   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

10 first time indication, the first time indication being associated with the first IM message,

11 the first time indication being displayed in response to computer-readable code adapted to

12 instruct a programmable device to determine that the second IM message has not been

13 displayed within the elapsed time.

1   21.   The computer-readable medium of claim 20, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to provide an

3 IM dialogue box within an IM chat window; and

4   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display the

5 first IM message within the IM dialogue box.

1   22.   The computer-readable medium of claim 21, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display the

3 first time indication in the IM dialogue box.

1   23.   The computer-readable medium of claim 20, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

3   first visual delineator after the first IM message, the first visual delineator having a time

4   associated with the first IM message.

1   24.   The computer-readable medium of claim 20, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

3   second IM message after the elapsed time;

4   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

5   second time indication, the second time indication being associated with the second IM

6   message, the second time indication being indicative of the elapsed time between the first

7   IM message and the second IM message.

1   25.   The computer-readable medium of claim 24, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

3   second visual delineator before the second IM message, the second visual delineator

4   having a time associated with the second IM message.

1   26.   The computer-readable medium of claim 25, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to provide an

3   IM dialogue box within an IM chat window; and

4   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display the

5   second visual delineator in the IM dialogue box.

1   27.   The computer-readable medium of claim 26, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to provide a

3   status area within the IM chat window, the status area being distinct from the IM dialogue

4   box; and

5   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to selectively

6   display a most-recently-displayed IM time in the IM dialogue box, the most-recently-

7   displayed IM time being associated with the most-recently-displayed IM message.

1   28.   A computer-readable medium comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to detect a

3   triggering event associated with an instant messaging (IM) chat session; and

4   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

5   visual indicator in response to the triggering event.

1   29.   The computer-readable medium of claim 28, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to detect an

3   initiation of a chat session

1   30.   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display an

3   initial IM time indication, the initial IM time indication being indicative of a start time of

4   the IM chat session.

1   31.   The computer-readable medium of claim 28, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to detect a

3   predefined period of inactivity.

1   32.   The computer-readable medium of claim 31, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display an

3   inactivity IM time indication, the inactivity IM time indication being indicative of an

4   onset of inactivity during the IM chat session.

1   33.   The computer-readable medium of claim 28, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to detect

3   continued activity after a predefined period of inactivity.

1   34.   The computer-readable medium of claim 33, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

3   continued-activity IM time indication, the continued-activity IM time indication being

4   indicative of a time at which the IM chat session continues after an onset of inactivity.

1   35.   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display an

3   inactivity IM time indication, the inactivity IM time indication being indicative of an

4   onset of inactivity during the IM chat session.

1   36.   The computer-readable medium of claim 29, further comprising:

2   computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to display a

3   continued-activity IM time indication, the continued-activity IM time indication being

4   indicative of a time at which the IM chat session continues after an onset of inactivity.

1   37.   A communication system comprising:

2   message-display logic configured to display instant messaging (IM) messages;

3   and

4   time-display logic configured to selectively display a time indication, the time

5   indication being indicative of a most-recently-displayed IM message.

1   38.   A communication system comprising:

2   message-display logic configured to display a first instant messaging (IM)

3   message;

4   time-calculation logic configured to calculate an elapsed time from the display of

5   the first IM message;

6   determination logic configured to determine whether a second IM message has

7   been displayed within the elapsed time;

8   time-display logic configured to display a first time indication, the first time

9   indication being associated with the first IM message, the first time indication being

10   displayed in response to determine that the second IM message has not been displayed

11   within the elapsed time.

1   39.   A communication system comprising:

2   detector logic configured to detect a triggering event associated with an instant

3 messaging (IM) chat session; and

4   display logic configured to display a visual indicator in response to the triggering

5 event.

1   40.   The method of claim 39, wherein the detector logic comprises:

2   means for detecting an initiation of a chat session;

3   means for detecting a predefined period of inactivity; and

4   means for detecting continued activity after a predefined period of inactivity.

1   41.   The method of claim 40, wherein the display logic comprises:

2   initial-time-display logic configured to display an initial IM time indication, the

3 initial IM time indication being indicative of a start time of the IM chat session.

1   42.   The method of claim 40, wherein the display logic comprises:

2   inactivity-time-display logic configured to display an inactivity IM time

3 indication, the inactivity IM time indication being indicative of an onset of inactivity

4 during the IM chat session.

1   43.   The method of claim 40, wherein the display logic comprises:

2   continued-activity-time-display logic configured to display a continued-activity

3 IM time indication, the continued-activity IM time indication being indicative of a time at

4 which the IM chat session continues after an onset of inactivity.